

REFUGEE

Arizona Refugee Resettlement Journal

resettlement

Volume 8, Issue 2

June 2007

ARIZONA REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT CONFERENCE:

ADVANCING A NOBLE CAUSE

The Black Canyon Conference Center in Phoenix was once again the setting for the annual conference of the Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program. Held March 26 and 27, the 2007 Conference, Beyond Flight, had as its theme:

“Refugees in Arizona—Along the Path of Freedom Lie the Seeds of Hope.”

Attendance at this year’s event topped the 300 mark and included refugee resettlement professionals, government agency and charitable organization representatives, health care and law enforcement personnel, educators and students, volunteers and refugees. Many came from other regions, including the District of Columbia and Virginia, New York and Ohio, Minnesota and South Dakota, Idaho and Colorado, to participate and to learn.

In his opening comments, Charles Shipman, Arizona State Refugee Coordinator, extended a special welcome to the out-of-state participants. “We’re glad you could join us,” he said, “and we’re happy to share with you both our warm hospitality and climate.”

Others in the audience he recognized included Tracy

Wareing, Director, Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES) and Rex Critchfield, Acting Assistant Director, DES Division of Aging and Adult Services.

Shipman then outlined the conference goals. “This year’s conference,” he said, “is about providing

refugees with protection through resettlement. It gives us the opportunity to share and examine approaches to providing the world’s persecuted and dispossessed hope and a new home. It’s about persuading the irresolute or indifferent, rejuvenating the weary, inspiring the creative, enlightening the perplexed, and advancing the noble cause of refugee protection and resettlement in our state.”

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Arizona State Refugee Coordinator Charles Shipman opened the 2007 Conference and welcomed the more than 300 attendees who gathered at the Black Canyon Conference Center for the two-day event.

He spoke also of the shifts in political landscapes around the world, noting that a decade ago the large majority of refugees coming to the United States were from the former Soviet Union and Southeast Asia. “Today,” he said, “we can no longer depend on a steady number of refugee arrivals, nor can we be certain, from one year to the next, which refugee

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THANK YOU FROM THE STATE COORDINATOR

Dear Friends,

This issue of the *Arizona Refugee Resettlement Journal* features highlights from the very successful 2007 Arizona State Refugee Conference, "Beyond



The friendly staff of Katherine Christian & Associates welcomed attendees to the 2007 Conference.

Flight: Refugees in Arizona." An event of this magnitude could not occur without the commitment and untiring efforts of the 2007 Planning Committee, led by Linda McAllister, International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the event organizers, Katherine Christian & Associates.

We're so grateful to the following individuals for their service on the planning committee:

Mimi Ahmed, Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program
Dorothy Balser, Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest (LSS-SW)
Cecilia Tambe-Ebot, Refugee and Immigrant Relief Center
Jennifer Doran, IRC
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Linda McAllister, IRC
Frank Migali, Arizona Department of Education
Jeanne Nizigiyimana, Catholic Charities
Amra Sabanic, Tucson International Alliance of Refugee Communities
Carla Sandine, IRC
Cara Steiner Kiggins, Community Outreach and Advocacy for Refugees
Bonnie Wood, Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program

A special thanks to Mullins Creative, for once again sharing their commitment to refugee resettlement by donating full color to a special edition that features the events of the State Conference.

Warmly,

Charles Shipman
State Refugee Coordinator ■

REFUGEE Arizona Refugee Resettlement Journal resettlement

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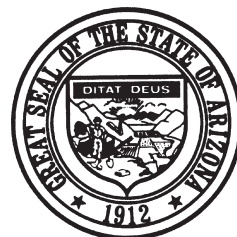
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OPENING KEYNOTE: ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN A NEW LAND

He was born and raised under difficult circumstances in Kenya, where he grew up in a dysfunctional family, experienced the death of five siblings, and suffered from chronic malaria and stomach illnesses. He spent six years in three grades in school, got his first underwear at age 13 and his first pair of shoes at 17. Yet, determined to succeed, he never allowed any obstacles to get in the way of his dreams, focusing on his studies and earning a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Nairobi.

Twenty years ago, he came to the United States as a refugee resettling in Wyoming. Continuing his education he earned both his Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of Wyoming.

Today, Dr. Vincent Muli Wa Kituku, his wife, and their four children make their home in

Boise, Idaho, and he has become a prominent and much-in-demand motivational speaker. A member of the National Speakers Association (NSA), he is among the fewer than seven percent of its members to become a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), the organization's highest earned designation.

Dr. Kituku's skills were very much in evidence at this year's conference, as he was the opening session's keynote speaker, captivating his audience with a powerful inspirational message titled: "New Life, New Challenges and Cultural Growth."

He began by pointing out the uniqueness of America, with its freedoms, abundant resources and, in his words, "opportunities for a second, third or even one hundredth chance for anyone to better his or her life."

The "outrageously available" resources he described include libraries and media resources, along with community education and financial support programs which are unheard of in most countries. He urged the refugees in his audience to recognize and take full advantage of such opportunities, and paid special tribute to what he called "the caring nature and helpful spirit of Americans."

WORDS OF ADVICE

In his message, Dr. Kituku listed several ways in which recently arrived refugees can quickly adjust to and become successful in their new land, including:

- being open-minded;
- avoiding assumptions about others;
- admitting ignorance and asking questions;
- being sensitive to the cultural differences of others and not hypersensitive about your own;
- treating people of diverse cultural backgrounds as equals;
- avoiding feelings of superiority or inferiority.

Vincent Kituku is living proof of the opportunities available to those who seek them. Ten years ago, he left a full-time, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. job to become a professional speaker, trainer and author. "I could no longer expect a paycheck every other week," he says, "and there were no more employment-related benefits. Nor did I have any assurance of when—or if—I would be called to give a speech and by whom. English is not my native or even second language, and my college education is not in any remote way related to what I was embarking on."

His final words of advice to the 2007 Conference attendees: "We cannot succeed as individuals," he said. "Hold the light you have high. You don't have to know everything to make a difference in someone else's life." ■



Dr. Kituku used numerous props, including a water buffalo tail, to inspire his audience as he shared his "tales" of overcoming obstacles to achieve success.

REPORT ON IRAQI HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

Monday's luncheon program featured an important message from Robert Carey, Vice President of Resettlement for the International Rescue Committee, who reported on the desperate situation facing Iraqis trying to escape from the terror and bloodshed taking place in their homeland. "It's a humanitarian crisis of major proportions," he said.



Many Iraqis have fled to the neighboring countries of Syria and Jordan. They've lost everything and, to make their already dire situation worse, neither of those countries recognizes refugee rights.

Concerns about harboring terrorist sympathizers have added to the woes of Iraqi refugees. For example, an Iraqi woman who may have been forced to cook for terrorists is often seen as providing "material support," making it more difficult for her to be approved for resettlement in another country.

In response to this humanitarian crisis, UNHCR has recently convened a two-day conference in Geneva to explore possible solutions. The situation, however, remains grave. To date, nearly four million Iraqis have been uprooted, a number that's increasing by 40,000 to 50,000 every week. More than one million of them are in Syria alone, a number far too large to permit permanent integration. And the few resources the Iraqi refugees were able to bring with them have been quickly exhausted. For many of them, their only alternative is to return to Iraq, once that can be done safely.

For others, the likelihood of a safe return to their homeland is remote. Having been perceived as U.S. partners or supporters, however unfair and inaccurate that perception may be, has essentially marked them for death should they return to Iraq.

In his message, Carey called for greater opportunities to be created that would allow many of these Iraqis to resettle in the United States. ■

OPENING KEYNOTE INSPIRES ATTENDEES

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groups will be arriving. This unpredictability, combined with the diverse array of refugees and their correspondingly increased needs, makes refugee resettlement increasingly complex."

A CASE IN POINT

Shipman illustrated this complexity with the story of a Karen family of three from Burma who had arrived in Phoenix last August. The parents were in their sixties and had a 17-year-old daughter who had been diagnosed with both mental retardation and severe seizures. The Karen were a new refugee group resettling in Phoenix, and little was known about their cultural perspectives on developmental disabilities. Arranging for the girl's medical care and

educational needs presented new challenges but, thanks to the support of the resettlement agency, the school, the local Burmese church, friends in their apartment complex and volunteers, the family is now doing well.

Shipman concluded his remarks by paying tribute to those attending the conference. "Thank you for your support and selflessness," he said, "that helps refugees to not just survive, but thrive. Your good work and contributions are helping to provide promising futures for those who have survived the worst kinds of inhumanity and injustice. And while Lady Liberty guards the Golden Door for those yearning to breathe free, your work personifies the true refuge once they cross its threshold." ■

*"... Your good work
and contributions are
helping to provide
promising futures for
those who have
survived the worst
kinds of inhumanity
and injustice."*

BREAKOUT SESSIONS COVER WIDE RANGE OF EDUCATIONAL TOPICS

Each morning and afternoon, attendees at this year's conference had the opportunity to choose from among a broad range of breakout sessions organized into five tracks:

Track 1 – Understanding the Refugee Resettlement Process

Track 2 – In the Field: Skill Building for Refugee Practitioners

Track 3 – Refugee Integration Issues

Track 4 – Education for Refugee Children and Youth

Track 5 – Modern Day Slavery

The following report presents highlights from some of the two dozen sessions which were available.

UNDERSTANDING THE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

On Monday morning, in a session titled "How and Why the U.S. Grants Refugee Status," Jana Mason, Director, Government Relations and Advocacy, International Rescue Committee, used a detailed PowerPoint presentation to describe the resettlement process.

In introducing her program, she reported that there are more than 12 million refugees worldwide, nearly five million of whom are in the Middle East, with approximately three million in Africa and another two million in South and Central Asia.

The resettlement process covers both admissions, for those refugees outside the United States, and asylum for those who are already here. For those seeking admission, an annual ceiling is set by the President of the United States. The current ceiling is 70,000, most of it allocated to various regions of the world, with 20,000 in an unallocated reserve. For African refugees, the ceiling is 22,000 and for Eastern Asia 11,000. The actual number of refugees admitted during the 2006 fiscal year was 41,277.



Between break-out sessions, conference attendees had lots of opportunities to make new friends, become reacquainted with old ones and generally share everyone's passion for the plight of refugees.

For those seeking asylum, there's no ceiling either on applications or grants of asylum. In the 2005 fiscal year, more than 25,000 individuals, 20 percent of them from China, were granted asylum. Refugees in both categories can apply for permanent residence after one year in the U.S., and for citizenship after five years.

COMMUNICATING THE RESETTLEMENT PROCESS

Monday afternoon's workshop, coordinated by COAR (Community Outreach and Advocacy for Refugees), focused on how best to explain both the refugee resettlement process and the needs and experiences of resettled refugees to three different audiences: the general public (volunteers), the media and elected public officials.

COAR officials consider these three audiences as essential partners in serving resettled refugees, and workshop participants were divided into separate groups to determine how each of these audiences can best meet refugee needs.

The objective of the government group, led by IRC's Jana Mason, was to identify how best to effect changes favorable to refugees

and refugee resettlement at the legislative level. For the media group, led by Katie Nelson, *Arizona Republic*, and Eliza Gregory, Arizona State University, the focus was on how to generate good and accurate refugee resettlement stories.

For the volunteer group, led by Donna Buckles, Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest, and

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Throughout the two-day event, speakers took the time to speak one-on-one with many of the conference attendees.



BREAKOUT SESSIONS FEATURE STUDENTS

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COAR's Cara Steiner Kiggins and Kimberly Hill, the objective was on how to attract volunteers to serve the refugees, or to at least create a general supportive environment for them.

The three groups then reassembled to report on their findings and to discuss their recommendations on the next steps to be taken.

EDUCATION FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Based on the feedback from several of the sessions held in this track, refugee students are doing some exciting things. On Monday afternoon Glendale High School students from Liberia, Sudan, Congo and Afghanistan described the challenges of moving to a new country, learning a new language and adjusting to a new culture. Asked to name some of what they'd learned since arriving in the U.S., they listed the importance of getting a good education, treating their teachers with respect, following their dreams, and never giving up.

On Tuesday morning, several students from Tucson's Catalina Magnet High School shared their stories. One young man from Afghanistan had fled to Pakistan with his family to escape the war in his country which had claimed the life of his father, a doctor. Now the son's dream is to become a nurse so he can return to his homeland to help his people.

Inspired and encouraged by their ESL/English teacher, a dedicated young woman named Julie Kasper, many of Catalina's refugee and immigrant students wrote stories and poems about their families, their cultures, their coming to America, and their dreams and goals. Last spring their writings were gathered together and published by the school in a



Glendale High School refugee students gather around Frank Migali from the Arizona Department of Education following their panel presentation focusing on life as refugee youths.

magazine titled "Finding My Voice." It was the first issue of what their teacher plans to have the students produce annually.

On Tuesday afternoon officials from the Washington Elementary School District located in Phoenix and the largest district in Arizona, with more than 25,000 students, presented an overview of its program model for refugees and immigrants. More than 300 refugee students and 6,000 students with limited English language skills attend district schools. They come from more than 50 countries and speak more than 50 languages.

Sue Brown, Program Specialist and Zlata Kovacevic, Community Liaison for Refugee Students, outlined the district's strategies for assimilating refugee and immigrant students into the public school system, and for addressing various concerns, including communication among all stakeholders in the educational process and relationships with peers and adults.

The dedication of all the educators who participated in the various breakout sessions in this track was clearly evident, as was the impact on the students they so unselfishly serve. According to one observer who sat in on the student sessions, the stories they told were consistently inspirational and heartwarming.

"The bond these students shared, despite their vast cultural differences, was obvious," he reported. "And the glowing smiles on the faces of their teachers, program leaders and other school officials as the students shared their stories spoke volumes of the joy they feel and the reward they get in pouring themselves into the lives of these youngsters." ■



Refugee students from Catalina Magnet High School in Tucson join teacher Julie Kasper after sharing their success stories in the Tucson school system.

NETWORKING RECEPTION — A NEW EVENT

A new feature of our 2007 Conference was a networking reception just prior to Monday evening's dinner program, giving attendees the opportunity to interact with speakers, representatives of the various agencies participating in the conference, fellow refugees and volunteers.

In addition to the entertainment and light hors d'oeuvres, there were large and colorful posters mounted on easels around the room, each poster depicting photos and moving stories of local refugees.



Based on the comments of many of those who participated, the networking reception is likely to become a fixture at future conferences. ■



The touching stories and photos displayed around the perimeter of the reception room were reproduced into booklets distributed to each attendee at the awards dinner.

EXHIBITORS PREPARE COLORFUL DISPLAYS TO SELL, INFORM

Throughout the conference, attendees had numerous opportunities to visit the Resource Center in the lobby, which featured a wide range of colorful displays and informative brochures and other materials provided by our exhibitors. Our thanks to the following organizations for their participation:

- Area Agency on Aging, Region One
- Association for Supportive Childcare
- Catholic Charities
- Community Outreach and Advocacy for Refugees
- High Profile Realty Advantage
- International Rescue Committee
- Refugee and Immigrant Relief Center

- Phoenix College International Student Center
- The Arizona Partnership for Immunization ■



AWARDS, DINNER, ENTERTAINMENT: AN EVENING TO CELEBRATE

Immediately following Monday's networking reception was the gala dinner program, an outstanding event which included the presentation of awards, excellent entertainment and the always colorful Pageant of Nations.

RESETTLEMENT HONORS AWARD

The first two awards were presented by Charles Shipman, State Refugee Coordinator. The Arizona Refugee Resettlement Honors award, a tribute to an Arizona refugee resettlement professional who has noticeably and affirmatively influenced refugee resettlement in Arizona, was presented to Maureen Webster, who recently retired as the Regional Director for Catholic Charities.



Maureen Webster, recipient of the Arizona Refugee Resettlement Honors award.

A graduate of Southern Methodist University, she taught school for six years before going to work for Catholic Charities, serving as a casework supervisor and director of programs for 15 years, until being named to her present post in 1993. Under her direction, the refugee resettlement staff has grown from 2 to 35, and her leadership, expertise and commitment to justice have been driving factors in her service to refugees.

Though often acknowledged and recognized as a refugee resettlement pioneer, Maureen's typical response has been: "My life has been so much richer with what I gain from refugees versus what I'm contributing to helping them."



Warren Taylor, the 2007 Arizona Refugee Champions Award recipient has been a visible champion for the Valley's refugees.

CHAMPIONS AWARD

Shipman next presented the Arizona Refugee Champions Award, which recognizes the outstanding humanitarian contributions of a non-refugee service professional to the advancement of refugee

resettlement and the betterment of refugees' lives in Arizona.

This year's recipient was Warren Taylor, who recently retired as a lieutenant with the City of Phoenix Police Department. Though officially "retired," he continues to co-chair the Refugee Advisory Council on Crime, and creates training workshops for refugees on such topics as federal and state laws, safety issues, and how to report a crime.

In presenting the award, Shipman said: "His high regard for the dignity and rights of refugees, his compassion and understanding of their flight from their countries of origin, his commitment to volunteering his time to youth and overall concern for every refugee's safety and well-being have been unwavering."

EDUCATOR AWARD

The next award, announced by Frank Migali, State Coordinator for Refugee Education, was the Arizona Refugee Educator Award, which was presented to Maime Spillane, a language acquisition teacher and refugee specialist at Prince Elementary School and Amphitheater Public Schools in Tucson.

While teaching regular third grade classes at Prince,

Maime noticed the number of refugee students from Africa increasingly rapidly. They spoke no English and lacked any formal education, so Maime agreed to leave her classroom behind in order to design and teach the Refugee Newcomer Program, incorporating everything from American cultural norms to the basics of reading, writing and math.

Outside the normal school day, Maime helps provide services to the students and their families, including such adult programs as English as a Second Language classes, vocational training and parenting skills. After-school programs for students include after-school tutorials, one-on-one mentoring summer school, African dance classes and a soccer team. She's also active in several organizations which work with refugees and, last year, visited the refugee camp in Somalia, where many of the families she helps once lived.



Maime Spillane, recipient of the 2007 Educator Award, assists her students in the classroom and their families outside the classroom.

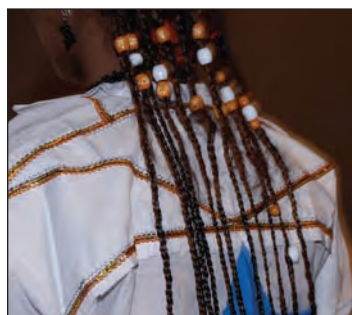
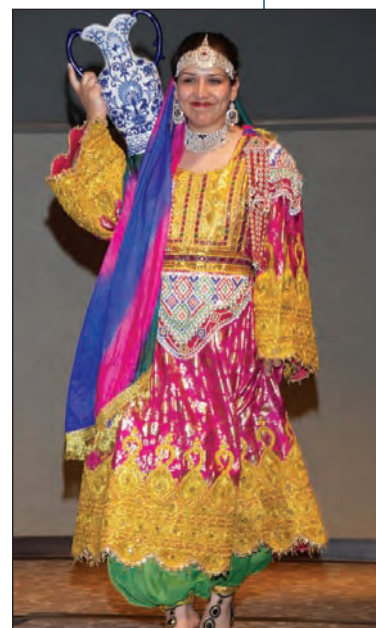
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ENTERTAINMENT HIGHLIGHTS EVENING

TRADITIONAL DRESS FASHION SHOW

Following dinner, 34 individuals representing 17 countries from around the world presented the Pageant of Nations, delighting the audience as they proudly modeled their traditional clothing, featuring beautiful colors and fabrics.

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Attendees were also treated to a dance presentation by four bright and energetic youngsters from the Arizona Youth Ballet

Monday evening's celebration was climaxed by Cuban singer José Carlos Fugueroa, whose entertaining and uplifting performance had many on their feet and dancing in the aisles.



KEYNOTE PANEL: GLOBAL RESETTLEMENT PERSPECTIVES

Tuesday's Keynote Panel Discussion was moderated by Arizona State Refugee Coordinator Charles Shipman and featured Thomas Albrecht, Deputy Regional Representative, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Ken Tota, Chief of Operations, Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). Both panelists had

journeyed from Washington, D.C. to participate in the annual conference and to provide insights on refugee issues at both the national and international levels.

Albrecht noted that while granting asylum has long been a tradition, refugee resettlement is relatively new and, until as recently as 10 years ago, was seen primarily as an immigration situation.

Thomas Albrecht joined the luncheon panel to share his refugee resettlement perspectives as the Deputy Regional Representative for UNHCR.

He described the three cornerstones of resettlement as: protecting the safety of refugees; finding a durable life for them where they can become self-supporting;

and not over-burdening any specific areas for refugees to resettle. Family reunification is also an important consideration and, he noted, "Cultural integration is an obvious benefit."

Today, the need is greater than ever, as wars, revolutions and other crises situations continue to drive millions of people, many of them women and children, from their native lands. And, according to UNHCR projections, the number of those seeking refuge will continue to increase.

To meet this growing global need, the number of countries where refugees are welcomed has increased from 10 to 25, each with its own varying requirements and quotas. Albrecht reported that, here in the United States, processing time has been reduced, while flexibility and responsiveness have increased. At the same time, security has been enhanced and partnerships have been strengthened.

Tota stated that, nationally, ORR is responding to the growing need by forecasting an annual budget for the 2008 fiscal year at \$614 million, an increase of \$45 million over the current fiscal year. He reported that Arizona's refugee resettlement program is among the largest in the U.S., and ranks seventh in total funding.

"Arizona," he said, "is recognized for its very strong resettlement program and has very positive employment outcomes. It's very obvious that the community of refugee providers has developed very good working relationships all to the benefit of those being resettled in Arizona."

Tota added: "We're excited about the newly formed Arizona Refugee Advancement Coalition (AZRAC), which could serve as a model for other states." ■

"... the newly formed Arizona Refugee Advancement Coalition (AZRAC), which could serve as a model for other states."



WORLD REFUGEE DAY JUNE 20, 2007

To recognize and celebrate the contributions of refugees throughout the world, a United Nations General Assembly Resolution was unanimously adopted in 2000, designating June 20 of every year as World Refugee Day. Since then, it has become an annual commemoration marked by a variety of events in more than one hundred countries.

This year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has chosen the theme: "New Home, New Life," and will focus on the United States' proud tradition of welcoming refugees, and the many contributions they bring to towns and cities across America.

To find out more about this day and the many activities scheduled throughout the world commemorating this special day, visit www.unhcr.org. ■



Returning for his second year at the Conference, Ken Tota complimented the community of Arizona refugee providers for their outstanding efforts in resettling the large number of refugees coming into the state each year.

EVENING EVENT: ONE TO REMEMBER

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OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Mohamed Al-Sharmani, a long-time staff member of the International Rescue Committee (IRC), was recognized on the eve of his retirement. Al-Sharmani, originally from Somalia, earned a Ph.D. and served as an Ambassador prior to joining the staff of the IRC-Phoenix. Robin Dunn Marcos, IRC Regional Director and Bob Carey, IRC Vice President, presented Al-Sharmani with a plaque, and Charles Shipman presented him with a certificate acknowledging his decade of service. ■



ARTIST HELPS REFUGEES TELL THEIR STORIES THROUGH PAINTING



One of Tuesday afternoon's breakout sessions, titled "Seeing Resettlement Through Their Eyes," featured well-known artist Hilary Wallis, who, in addition to her own painting activities, is a consultant to various nonprofit organizations, including the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

Hilary founded the Empowerment Through Arts Program which evolved from a visit to Uganda where she taught adults and children to use art as a therapeutic medium of expression to aid emotional and social development, promote awareness, and empower communities. "In the short period I was there," she said, "I witnessed the healing power of art as a tool to empower the individual, promote awareness of the issues, and provide foundations of growth within an entire community."

Along with many creative paintings completed by refugees, Hilary shared a documentary video of her Arts Program and the refugees responding to the discovery of their creative abilities.

In addition to speaking at the Arizona Refugee Resettlement conference, while in Phoenix, Hilary, on behalf of the IRC, conducted art therapy sessions to refugee youth, teaching and encouraging them to tell their stories by painting them. Some of the children's paintings that depict the transformation of life in their former countries to their new homes in Arizona may be seen on Hilary's web site: www.hilarywallis.net. ■



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WELCOMING NEW CITIZENS TO THE USA

Among the many highlights of this year's conference was Tuesday morning's naturalization ceremony sponsored by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP).



U.S. President George W. Bush and the song "God Bless the U.S.A.," performed by Lee Greenwood.

The stirring and patriotic program included a color guard from the U.S. Air Force Junior ROTC unit at Sunnyslope High School, and two video presentations, the first titled "A Visit to Ellis Island," and the second featuring comments by

The highlight of the program was the admission of 24 candidates from 18 nations to U.S. citizenship, as they proudly recited The Pledge of Allegiance, The American's Creed and The Oath of Allegiance to their adopted country. Presenting their Naturalization Certificates were Mary Esther Johnson, USCIS, and Charles Shipman, Arizona State Refugee Coordinator.

